

Kaya Director

As a passionate advocate for the Reconciliation Movement, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to this discussion paper.

While the paper has some merit and goes to recognise the institutional and accountability gaps (although *chasm* is a better reflection of the facts) as well as the many failed attempts to make any progress, instil permanency or make lasting improvement in the 27 years since the Royal Commission in 1991, I find myself questioning if the WA government is serious about getting buy-in for an independent advocacy to change all this, why there has been no attempt to address the real 'elephant' in the room:

**First Australians would not be a commodity with no political influence if they were recognised with deserved equality under the Constitution.**

I struggle for instance to reconcile the intent of this paper with the statement on the Department of the Premier and Cabinet for WA website that says, "*Indigenous Affairs remains a national priority for the Australian Government and that the Indigenous Affairs Group within PM&C is committed to improving the lives of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*" when by the actions of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull toward the Referendum Council's recommendation for a voice in Parliament (*Uluru Statement from the Heart*) presented to him in October 2017, indicates he feels the complete opposite of commitment, using his political ego to **singlehandedly reject the Statement and thereby Aboriginal people across the Nation, like one would swat an annoying gnat – with contempt and indifference.**

### **Beyond Betrayal**

Noel Pearson's moving and heartfelt essay "*Betrayal*" and the article that followed by Shireen Morris' on 7 March 2018, both eloquently sum up the feelings of Aboriginal groups and Non-Aboriginal people alike when she likened Turnbull's indifference to "**...a callous display of unilateral exercise of government power over the powerless...by a man who assumed he knew what was best for Aboriginal people**".

So, I think the question that really needs answering is **where is the integrity in this discussion, if the underlying expectation of the WA Government is for Aboriginal groups across WA to trust the proposed independent advocacy, despite the undeniable fact that the Premier and the Prime Minister are not even on the same page?**

### **Stop the Discussion: Simply Hear, See and Act on what you already know**

Whadjuk Noongar, Yamantji, Wankai (Wongai), Kimberley and Ngaanyatjarra communities **don't need to be told what the WA government "believes"**, when their young people are committing suicide at such an alarming rate <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-20/two-grandsons-lost-to-suicide-inquiry-regional-mental-health/10013898> just as they don't need to be told what the WA government "believes" when so many Aboriginal groups feel like '**another [government] statistic**' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-23/family-speaks-about-kimberley-girls-suicide/10017252> and they definitely don't need to be told what the WA Government "believes" when the climbing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody **is as a direct result of the government's consistent failure to assure justice in a White system that fails to recognise the chasm of cultural differences.**

With respect Director, while the WA government has been dithering over this discussion paper, **Aboriginal communities have been getting on with what they know needs to be done**, with the

support of many Non-Aboriginal groups and their local towns, shires and councils, to bring their respective communities out of the cycle of disadvantage that you have recognised in this discussion paper:

√ **ABC News 20/06/18** - The first entirely indigenous-run police station in Australia is using cultural ties to gain the trust of remote Aboriginal community:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-20/this-is-the-first-indigenous-run-police-station-in-australia/9861778>

√ **March 2018 – Fly the Flag at Tambellup Police Station Fundraiser (flagpoles):**

<https://chuffed.org/project/fly-the-flag> Whadjuk Elder, Aunty Margaret Culbong raised \$1,400 (I am proud to say I supported her too) to purchase flag poles to fly the Aboriginal flag at Tambellup Police Station **(supported by the shire, but apparently not the WA Government)** where her son is the Officer in Charge. Aunty Margaret has also been instrumental in improving the health and welfare of Aboriginal people by setting up Aboriginal controlled health services and raising the profile of Aboriginal health issues in WA and her current mission is to open an Aboriginal owned and operated prison, so that she can turn these abhorrent prison statics around – **that is where WA government funding should be focused.**

√ **14/07/18 NAIDOC Week:** Because of grandmother's resolve, children set perfect school attendance: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-14/because-of-her-the-children-are-set-to-succeed-at-school/9991504>

### **The time for further discussion has run its course**

While we cannot be responsible for the past, having acknowledged the history and identified where the Australian Government falls short, the time has come to talk less and act more because the only way the *“interests and priorities of Aboriginal people will be promoted with any permanency or independence of the government of the day”* is for entire Australian government to stop insisting **that they know what is best for Aboriginal people.**

Embracing a future based on real integrity across the parliamentary board while actively making inroads to recognise First Australians' constitutional rights is the only way the Australian government can be collectively instrumental in bringing an end to the equally diabolical and vicious cycle of discussion and debate by:

- accepting that there will be no genuine engagement if the WA government still “believes” *“Accountability for outcomes in Aboriginal Affairs is about policy setting...”* and that if the WA Government really wants to acknowledge the *“context of historic and cyclical causes of disadvantage”*, they will simply put a stop to the repetitive mistakes and egotistical political bureaucracy that keep the cycle of disadvantage going;
- acknowledging that *“...political and bureaucratic commitment...”* is not the way forward, when the intention is for the outcome of any decisions that most affect Aboriginal groups across WA, will be entirely dependent on the **approval of a parliamentary dictatorship that has systematically undermined any effort to reconcile** despite the call from the Nation to do so (examples of which you are already aware of);
- recognising that **real trust** must be forged **with true intent and integrity** else the Australian Government will simply *remain* the distrusted, shameful and authoritarian entity that is **singlehandedly accountable for the ongoing cycle of marginalism, despair, rising suicides, rising prison statistics and the general disadvantage** that is rife in many Aboriginal communities;

- respecting that Aboriginal Elders and their experienced allies are perfectly capable of developing the required operational strategy, framework, programs and naming of this advocacy without undue interference from the government: **Elders know better than any government what they need for their communities and who the best Office Holder should be;** and finally,
- acknowledge that the WA government cannot nor should they, guarantee *“a permanent dedicated entity with statutory powers and independence from the Government of the day”*, because we already know how a single act of “political bastardry” <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-27/decision-to-reject-ularu-statement-is-indefensible/9093408> ] can “go unanswered” [Sean Gordon, CEO Darkinjung Aboriginal Land Council].

Director, the government has reached the point where “gradual improvement” is not good enough and if the Aboriginal Policy Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet firmly believes that *“to strengthen accountability will be most effective if designed with input from the people it is intended to serve – Aboriginal people, communities and organisations”*, **then this government should get out of your own way**, hear the many voices who have already spoken and be the State that leads **real commitment** to finally deliver what the Referendum Council came to the Prime Ministers table in October to discuss...

**...changes to the current racially discriminatory Constitution to be rewritten to encourage political influence by Aboriginal communities in their own affairs and deserved equality and recognition as First Australians.**

Have a great day.  
Kaz Braid